



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

Joint investigation by United States, Trinidad and Tobago, and Ecuador dismantles international drug trafficking organization

22 defendants charged -- Arrests made in Nevada, California, New York and Puerto Rico -- Heroin seized in Las Vegas, Trinidad and Ecuador

New York — Twenty-two defendants have been charged for their participation in an international heroin smuggling organization responsible for the importation of more than 200 kilograms of heroin with a street value of more than \$14 million into the United States since 2004.

Over the course of the investigation, United States, Trinidadian, and Ecuadorian authorities seized approximately 28 kilograms of heroin, including five kilograms abandoned by a drug courier in a Guayaquil, Ecuador hotel, four kilograms seized at the Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, more than four and one-half kilograms seized at John F. Kennedy Airport in Queens, and nearly six kilograms seized at the Piarco International Airport in Trinidad. Law enforcement agents also seized approximately \$220,000 in cash. The charges are the result of a 10-month investigation that was conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Justice Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, and utilized multiple confidential witnesses and sources, court-authorized wiretaps, surveillance, and a controlled heroin delivery.

Yesterday and earlier today, nine defendants were arrested in Las Vegas, Nevada, one defendant was arrested in Palm Springs, California, one defendant was arrested in Caguas, Puerto Rico, and one defendant was arrested in New York.

The charges and arrests were announced by Roslynn R. Mausekopf, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Julie L. Myers, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), and John P. Gilbride, Special Agent-in-Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration, New York.

The complaint unsealed in Brooklyn this morning charges 15 defendants, including the organization's leaders, JAVIER ALEXANDER ALVAREZ MONROY, a former police officer in Bogota, Colombia, and MARC KLINDT. The investigation revealed that MONROY and KLINDT used couriers to smuggle the organization's heroin from several foreign countries, including Ecuador, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico, to New York for distribution. The organization employed more than a dozen drug couriers and recruiters, many of

whom made multiple drug trips and most of whom were based in the Las Vegas area. Typically, the drug couriers smuggled between three to five kilograms of heroin per trip concealed within the lining of clothes. The investigation also disclosed that MONROY and KLINDT used the Internet to communicate with their foreign sources of supply and their drug couriers.

In addition to MONROY and KLINDT, the defendants charged today are WENDY HOLIDAY, CHANTELLE DAVILA, and PAOLA LUJAN, who recruited couriers for the organization, including MICHELE KATZ, PIERRE MEAD, ANDRES SANTILLANA, TOBY DAGY, ALBERTO ROMAN, and EUGENIO SASTRE FERNANDEZ; NORMA ESCALANTE and her sister ANGELICA ESCALANTE, who met the couriers upon their return to the United States and retrieved their heroin; HECTOR NAVARRO, also known as "Cesar," who assisted the organization's money laundering activities; and two defendants who acted as both recruiters and drug couriers, JEANETTE VIDAL and CHERYL BENTON. VIDAL, a Las Vegas-area schoolteacher, was intercepted in a March 2006 telephone conversation with MONROY planning a drug importation trip that would coincide with her "spring break."

Yesterday, agents arrested HECTOR NAVARRO in Ridgewood, New York. Agents subsequently searched NAVARRO's residence in Ridgewood pursuant to a court-issued search warrant and seized approximately \$196,520 in United States currency, and more than three kilograms of substances that tested positive for the presence of heroin and cocaine. NAVARRO has his initial appearance scheduled this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Steven M. Gold, at the U. S. Courthouse, 225 Cadman Plaza East, Brooklyn, New York.

Previously, as part of the investigation, federal agents in the United States arrested three couriers for the organization, FRANKIE BALENTINE, PAUL CORRALES, and GABRIEL HERNANDEZ, and one recruiter, GABRIELLE GUSZ. HERNANDEZ was initially arrested in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and then extradited to the United States for prosecution. In addition, United States authorities earlier arrested CIRO TORRES and RAUL URENA, who were responsible for picking up heroin from drug couriers arriving in the New York metropolitan area.

MONROY, KLINDT, HOLIDAY, DAVILA, VIDAL, LUJAN, KATZ, MEAD, SANTILLANA, SASTRE, ROMAN, NAVARRO, BRENTON, URENA, DAGY, BALENTINE, NORMA ESCALANTE, and ANGELICA ESCALANTE are each charged with conspiring to import a kilogram or more of heroin, and if convicted face maximum sentences of life imprisonment and a \$4 million fine. GUSZ, HERNANDEZ, CORRALES, and TORRES previously pled guilty to conspiring to import a kilogram or more of heroin and face the same maximum sentence.

"The Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF") is a key component in the United States' fight against drug trafficking," stated United States Attorney Mauskopf. "In this truly international investigation, OCDETF worked closely with its counterparts in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in Ecuador, to shut down a far reaching heroin importation organization and close its drug pipeline. I commend the ICE and DEA agents in New York and Las Vegas for their hard work and dedication, and I extend my appreciation to the United States Attorney's Office in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Central Authority for the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Counter Drug-Crime Task Force of the Ministry of National Security of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Ecuadorian National Police, for their invaluable assistance in this investigation."

"Drugs destroy too many American lives," said Assistant Secretary Myers. "I'm pleased that today we dismantled a major drug trafficking organization that threatened the safety of our citizens. Through Operation Viva Las Vegas, we've closed the door on a group of smugglers that sought their own profitable gains at the expense of American lives. ICE will continue to work with its law enforcement partners to investigate these crimes and bring these drug traffickers to justice."

DEA Special Agent-in-Charge Gilbride stated, "Heroin-laden clothes or heroin hidden in soles of shoes - it makes no difference how it is smuggled into the United States, law enforcement will find it. This investigation shows that through collaborative efforts with our local and international partners, the DEA is committed to identifying, investigating, and dismantling drug trafficking organizations so we can stop the flow of poison onto the streets of our communities."

Assistant United States Attorney Jeff Rabkin is prosecuting the government's case. The defendants are:

Javier Alexander Alvarez Monroy
DOB: 07/07/1979

Pierre Mead
DOB: 09/01/1964

Marc Klindt
DOB: 03/29/1977

Andres Santillana
DOB: 05/22/1942

Angelica Escalante
DOB: 06/29/1969

Eugenio Sastre Fernandez
DOB: 04/28/1979

Norma Escalante
DOB: 06/07/1961

Hector Navarro
DOB: 3/2/1965

Paola Lujan
DOB: Unkown

Gabrielle Gusz
DOB: 05/27/1960

Chantelle Davila
DOB: 07/15/1974

Raul Urena
DOB: 11/01/1958

Wendy Holiday
DOB: 01/29/1971

Paul Corrales
DOB: 07/23/1966

Cheryl Brenton
DOB: 10/31/1960

Ciro Torres
DOB: 10/30/1968

Jeanette Vidal
DOB: 09/17/1958

Frankie Balentine
DOB: 01/15/1957

Alberto Bada Roman
DOB: 11/15/1986

Toby Dagy
DOB: 09/06/1953

Michele Katz
DOB: 08/04/1969

Gabriel Hernandez
DOB: 05/05/1982

The charges announced today are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.